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Duxbury's Native American Heritage

Reflections From King Philip's Stone Throne
By the REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

As I sat in the stone niche in the barn-size boulder, which I was told was the seat of King Philip whence he held council with his chiefs in Pow-wow, many thoughts flooded my mind. The circle of small boulders in front of me reminded me of that council held some 3 centuries ago and that climaxed in the decision to go to war against the multiplying intruders. It was here where it began, and I was taken back to my visit to the altar of the "Sky God" on the grasslands of Mongolia whence Genghis Khan initiated his invasions of the entire Eurasian continent as far as the Caspian Sea including a land mass greater than that of Alexander the Great. The big difference between these 2 historic events was that King Philip would be destroyed and apparently his cause, while that of Genghis Khan would conquer the known world.

It will be the burden of this essay to show that far from being snuffed out, this brief effort of native Americans to assert sovereignty over their land would issue today in a worldwide movement to save not just a corner of the earth, our Mother, but the earth itself. So in the end King Philip in his own way lives on to share the insights of his people and in the end preserve a life for all mankind.

It was not difficult for me to let my imagination wander as I sat on this damp and cold forbidding spot. The year would be about 1670. King Philip's father, Massasoit had died 8 years before, and the warm welcome he had extended to these newcomers had worn thin as it began to appear that they were moving to take over all the land. A plague of uncertain origin had swept through most of Eastern Massachusetts and many tribes were too weakened to stand up against an invasion. What was more, many Indian tribes were at war with one another. For centuries since their arrival in these parts around 600 AD they had had a good life, hibernating in the woods around Middleboro and Taunton and Natick. Recent discoveries of camp sites by high schoolers on field trips as reported by Joe Grady, our environmental officer verify Dorothy Wentworth's report in her "Settlement and Growth of Duxbury" that it was the custom for centuries for Indians to move into the shore

reverence for the earth and its creatures, and considered land as communal. The white arrivals believed in settled farms and houses instead of temporary wigwams; individually owned land was unknown to them. The newcomers had a sense of obligation to "civilize" these they called "savages" and set up "praying villages" to accomplish this. Fourteen of them were scattered around the colony of Plymouth. The figure of 1437 is given by Justin Winsor in his History of Duxbury as the number of converts. The House of Burgesses in Virginia had appropriated 20,000 pounds to expand the work of these villages but after the massacres of 1622 and 1642 reversed the decision and spent these funds to outfit a militia and begin a program of extermination. It was a Wellesley professor lecturing before a Duxbury Rural & Historical audience who explained this fact, of which many present had been unaware until then.

King Philip as he sat on this same stone declivity where I was sitting before his chiefs in Pow wow must have had some sobering thoughts as he surveyed the scene before him: the meadow, and swamp and the distant river. His father, Massasoit, had welcomed the new white settlers and a few of them had become real supporters of the new venture. Hobomock (whose wigwam stands today in Plimoth Plantation) and Squanto and Samoset had taught these new adventurers many techniques of survival in this difficult land. Without their help it would have been impossible for them to survive and indeed half of them perished that first terrible winter. At first it seemed as if a coexistence could be achieved as we recall many Indians brought wild game and fish to that first Thanksgiving celebration. Philip believed that there was room enough for all of them.

But after the death of his father in 1662, things had changed radically. The white men did indeed pay for the land they inhabited but claimed an exclusive right to it,

retaining it and exploiting it by force of arms, depriving his tribesmen of space so essential for their life style.

King Philip had heard the news that 29 men from Duxbury had purchased a several square mile area from the Queen of the Awashonks not more than 20 miles from where he sat. Their leader, Benjamin Church, was a Duxburyite born in Plymouth in 1639 and moved to Duxbury where he purchased several acres of land in the northwest section of town beyond the highway that bears his name.

I narrowly missed a personal connection with Native Americans when the Bishop of Maine assigned me to 3 Indian missions under his jurisdiction (Molunkus, Macwahoc, and Mattawamkeag) only to have his order countermanded by the widow of the former pastor of Wiscasset, where I began my ministry instead.

Ironically a second remote contact with Indians took place also in Maine, where I had accepted an assignment as assistant to the rector of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Falmouth across the bay from Portland. Here the first attempt to readjudicate Indian land claims was made in a lawsuit brought by the Passamaquoddy Indians argued by a young lawyer named Thomas Tureen and heard by a member of St. Mary's, Judge Edward Gignoux. Judge Gignoux, knowing my interest in the liberation of oppressed peoples let me know early on that it looked as if almost half of the state of Maine had been obtained fraudulently. Present residents of the land had not cleared title to it through the federal government as required by law in an act of the Continental Congress in 1790. A long court trial ensued and a cash settlement was arranged reaffirming the independence of the Indian tribes involved. Moving farther afield but connecting with this issue close friends of mine have reported from their city of Salamanca, NY, that the Seneca tribe there has asserted sovereignty over the entire city alleging that this land on which the city sits was obtained

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around 600 AD they had had a good life, intermingling in the woods around Middleboro and Taunton and Natick. Recent discoveries of camp sites by high schoolers on field trips as reported by Joe Grady, our environmental officer verify Dorothy Wentworth's report in her "Settlement and Growth of Duxbury" that it was the custom for centuries for Indians to move into the shore of lakes and ponds and streets of Duxbury, plant their crops, fish and clam in the protected bay and return to their villages.

No records are available to tell us just how many native Americans there were, but estimates go as far as 15,000 to 20,000. Wampanoags were closest to Duxbury and Plymouth, occupying the entire lower Cape and the Buzzard's Bay area. The tribes named Massachusetts occupied all of Eastern Mass. The Pequots and the Niantics were located in Connecticut. All derived from the Algonquins of Eastern New York so they had a common language and were able to communicate across tribal boundaries. They had much more in common than their language; they had a

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DUXBURY'S NATIVE

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fraudulently. A resident of the city planned to move his house but the Seneca tribal council obtained a court order preventing it. After all, it was their land!

We all know the decision King Philip made with his chiefs, and we know the outcome. We also know the tragic stories of oppression and of the massacre of the Indian peoples as at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. We know too of the continuous making and breaking of treaties in the relentless and often ruthless westward march of pioneers supported by the army of the U.S. Indian clashes have become part of American folklore such as General Armstrong Custer's last stand at the Battle of Little Big Horn Mountain.

Duxbury comes back into the picture during King Philip's war when according to Justin Winsor in his *History of Duxbury* 497 "Praying Indians" i.e. Indians who had converted to Christianity and hence were a main target of Non-Christian Indians were placed on Clark's Island for protective custody around the years 1676-9. I phoned Clinton Watson to ask whether there were any Indian graves on the islands. His reply told of his great grandfather's purchase of the island with 2 other men in 1691. Justin also reports that there were 2 or 3 call-ups of soldiers from Duxbury involving around 16 men. I remember well as a lad that another name for Clark's Island was "Watson's Island," for Clint's ancestor bought out the other 2 men's shares shortly after the purchase.

At the suggestion of our town historian Katherine Pillsbury I phoned an Indian trustee of the Plimoth Plantation, Anthony Pollard, a member of the Wampanoag tribe living in Mashpee and received a wealth of information about the current status of what we know know as "Native Americans." This new title acknowledges a raising of Indians as a race to the level of a "recognized minority" on the American political scene. But it still does not solve the continuing dilemma how clashing cultures can reach an accommodation resulting in harmonious social relationships between native Americans and the rest of us.

The present intercourse between Indians and whites (also Browns and Blacks) with the general appreciation of Indian lore and its significance for the preservation of the environment suggests a resolution of the traditional stand-off between the races. Realizing that we all stand to lose our basis of living we can learn from our Indian brothers and sisters how to use the resources of the planet without abusing them. Contemporary revelations of the indiscriminate disposal of toxic wastes as we have seen them show the need to learn from the Indian life-

style. Perhaps other races can study Indian artifacts and learn their applications to our present situation. This is the first point in understanding the contribution of King Philip and his people.

For centuries human beings have risen up as races and exterminated those who stood in their way. Today the world stands aghast at the so-called ethnic cleansing that is currently being practiced by the Serbs. The horror with which the world observes this by close range through our TV screens may pave the way to a new relationship to our fellow human beings. Vice-President Gore helps us understand this in his book *Earth in the Balance* in which he urges all citizens of the world to put the same kind of energy and imagination into rescuing the environment as we did in the arms race that we held during the Cold War. He warns us that we can not continue to pollute the air, poison the soil and destroy our forests as in the past. He urges us to adopt the conservation habits like the Indians before us. Such appreciating and pooling our differences is the only answer to racism. The humanitarian principles of King Philip and his people must be ours if we are to preserve "this fragile earth our island home" for the future.

Perhaps as we highlight our Indian names of streets and villages we can look again at the clash of cultures we believed we were unable to reconcile, we can take a new look not only at this possibility but at the carnage of Yugoslavia, of northern Ireland and half a dozen places around the globe where the old practice of annihilating our fellow humans who look and act differently than we do still persists.

So I got up from the stone niche Philip used as his "seat" and made our way back to Duxbury. It was a very easy trip to the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology. Simply drive down Rte. 44 into Rte. 24 south, and continue on after a brief job over Rt. 195, finally ending in Rte. RI 136. A turn up 136 across a new bridge and then after a half mile or so, take a right into the park area. The entire trip in no-peak traffic times should not take more than an hour. The distance we noted was 55 miles, and well worth the time and expense to broaden our insight into our Indian heritage.

Third Annual Duxbury Spring Dance

On Sunday, May 23, the night after the high school prom, from 6 to 10 pm at the school the Third Annual Duxbury Spring Celebration Dance will be held. This event is open to everyone in the community and we cordially invite you to attend. Proceeds from this event are used to support academic Summa Awards to our deserving youth at Duxbury High School.

As in previous years, the Junior class is graciously allowing us to use their decorations and creativity in recreating "A Night in the Orient" for an evening of fine

food and dancing.

The Spring Celebration weekend supporting the "PTA Council in conjunction will be distributing grown as a symbol of support. Also, all residents are urged on all night, Saturday, a school prom as a symbol of people on this special night



Proceeds from the PTA Celebration Dance on sponsor the Summa Awards former winners and a Committee include (Katie Towers, Kr Burchard, and Hillary designing a logo for the

The Spring Celebration Norfleet's of Kingston, and the High School Chamber (Peters.

A special feature this year to see *Miss Saigon* in Boston. Tickets may be purchased 585-4040. We would love to

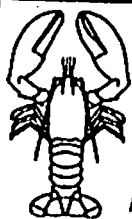
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